



I walked my beagle and my mom's Bichon Frise this afternoon, delighting in the warmth of winter sunshine, and breathing in the clean air washed by the previous night's rain. Toby, the beagle, pulled me in one direction, while Cokie, the walking white fluff ball, tugged at my left arm in the opposite direction of the stubborn hound. To neighborhood traffic, I must have appeared to be the victim of canine torture, or just another schmuck dog owner with little control over the four-legged species commonly referred to as our "best friends." When I finally persuaded Toby to move in the same direction as the more obstinate Miss Cokie, I made a mental comparison between the dogs and their owners.

Cokie is white, her coat matching the sugary color of my mom's hair. She is in her early eighties, my mom in her late seventies. Both have their aches and pains, both like ice cream, and they both have dark eyes inset on chalky faces. Toby is loud and in his fifties, like me. He is bullheaded, like me, and he has been lucky in love, like me. I wonder who starts to resemble whom first. Do the dogs take on our personalities, or do we adjust, assimilating their characteristics? Why am I even having these thoughts?

I am making these observations because I am attempting to *slow down* and really look at things, let my imagination run, and live in the moment. Already a month ago on New Year's weekend, I listened to the Sunday morning NPR broadcast of

*To The Best of Our Knowledge*.

Whether it was coincidence or providence, the theme of the show was the culture of slowing down, a counter response to our fast-paced lifestyle of cyber communications and drive-thru dining. The show's topic was timely, and almost surreal, because of my aspirations toward my goal of slowing down.

On the program, Carl Honore, author of *In Praise of Slowness*, was interviewed. I bought his book on Amazon, and although I am reading it at turtle speed (reading is one activity that could use some speeding up), Honore's thoughts on patience, especially as it relates to the process of healing, help me understand that some things cannot be rushed, no matter how badly we want them to occur.

The fact is I am receiving some of the things I wished for in this new year. My resolution to slow down was answered by my mother's twelve-day stay at Beaufort Memorial Hospital in January. My desire to remain in Beaufort and at home for a while, instead of being on the road, a slave to the harried travel schedule I maintained the previous month, was satiated by the aftercare I need to provide for my mom. And yet, I am someone whose neck hairs bristle when someone tells me to be careful what I wish for. Even the counsel that prayers are answered in the best ways, and not necessarily in the exact response I anticipate from my Higher Power, rubs my consciousness like sandpaper against the grain, smoothing my edges and the splinters of my expectations.

And so, I am in the throes of care giving – my mom, her dog, our dog and to a much lesser degree, my husband. Of course, what falls by the wayside is the care of self. There is always a constant tugging – a pull by my parent, a nudge from my husband, and work yanks my attention to the realities of productivity in an effort to earn a living. Taking the time to write these random thoughts are a real gift to me, possibly selfish, but certainly healthy.

The other day, my neighbor made the comment that no one really writes about aging, the truth about it, how it slowly diminishes one's physical capabilities, and changes the face looking back in the mirror. I was silent. I do not believe that is true, the part about no one writing about the realities of aging. Just this evening, I read a short story by Frederick Buechner, from a book that I received as a birthday gift. In the story entitled *Our Last Drive Together*, Buechner writes about his mother, her ninety-year-old idiosyncrasies, her frailties, and her eventual passing away. The story reminded me that we all slow down, whether it is by choice or circumstance. People around us confirm the aging process, theirs and ours. We just don't pay attention. We are not gentle. We lack a degree of compassion for one another's journey. At twenty, it is difficult to empathize with fifty, and at age fifty, it is a challenge to relate to the eighty year-old.

Until, that is, on bright and sunny afternoons, we take the opportunity to walk behind our dogs, watching their rear-ends sway, stopping to let them sniff the odors surrounding mailbox posts and tree stumps. We may recognize ourselves in our animals because we cannot see ourselves in those we love. We are too busy wondering what we will become, disappointed by who we are, and dwelling on what is lost. But every now and then, we get glimpses of what we

prayed for, or wished for, coming true in ways and in people that we could not have imagined. We only truly see ourselves, no matter how old or young we are, when we slow down to look, and how we look at ourselves is really a matter of choice.

My aunt gave me a small wooden plaque this past Christmas with the prayer, “Lord, make me the person my dog thinks I am.” I do not know what Toby thinks, but if I can just be a bit more like my beagle – curious, playful, and unconditional in the way I love – I will successfully meet the demands of this new year, one day at a time, slowly.

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